

# Behind The Scenes

# Christy PARKER

By Erica Faulkner

**“Generosity is doing something for someone else and expecting nothing in return”- Simon Sinek**

It takes a special person to give unconditionally. It takes a person who has been through many obstacles, yet persevered until success was inevitable, to be able to learn the value of giving back to those in need. It takes someone who understands the value of what she has because she has worked for it all on her own. Generous is a term that describes those who give more than they receive. It is a term that describes Christy Parker to perfection. Parker, who owns and operates Pine Haven Stables in Brunswick, Ga., provides top level riding instruction to those in her area. She also donates her time and resources to the show horse community at large, without ever asking for her name to be in the spotlight.

Parker was born and raised in the South. St. Simons Island, Georgia to be exact. Unlike many horse trainers today whose heritage runs deep within the horse industry, Parker's family had interests in other lines of work. “My father was a bank developer and a mortgage broker,” says Parker. “My parents both had horses growing up, but never rode with instruction or in any type of competition.” Even Parker's only brother held a job outside of horses as an insurance adjuster. Parker enjoyed the horses her family owned while she was young, yet she also enjoyed other sports as well. “I played Varsity Tennis, participated in Tap, Jazz and Ballet. I even played softball!” And if that isn't variety enough, she also enjoyed time behind the piano. However, her true love always belonged to her four legged friends.



*Christy Parker meets Nancy Forter and CH Blackboard in center ring after they won the Western Pleasure Grand Championship at the Pro Am Benefit Horse Show in 2014. It was an emotional moment for Parker, as shortly after the show Forter lost her battle with cancer.*



*Parker enjoyed heading cross country with her family on road trips. Here, she poses at one of their stops, the Kentucky Horse Park.*

“I was six years old when I started to ride Saddle Seat at a local barn, Sea Island Stables,” says Parker. “We had a local circuit we showed on and I have so many great memories from that time.” She continued to ride as often as she could over the following years. At 12 years of age, her family was leasing a horse for her to show, when Parker experienced the pain of losing something she loved. “I was told the Saddlebred I was leasing was leaving,” comments Parker. “I was completely heartbroken.” Her father did all he could to help support his daughter's passion. “My dad tried to buy the horse, but the price was just too high.” Still wanting to give his daughter every opportunity available, he sent her off with Julie Kaufman to a nearby farm to take lessons. It was during this time that Parker developed her passion for the American Saddlebred. “Jimmy Glidewell was instructing me at the time, and he put me on the black pleasure mare, American Lane. She was by far

the nicest Saddlebred I had ridden or even seen.” Parker was hooked.

Glidewell taught Parker many lessons during their time together. Parker smiles and laughs as she recalls one show where she learned, through the encouragement of Glidewell, to face obstacles, whether small or large, with a fierce determination. “I remember a horse show where I was about to get on my equitation horse to go in a class. Suddenly I heard a ripping sound,” recalls Parker. “I had split my jods!” However, without skipping a beat, Glidewell told her to “Suck it up and ride.” Despite feeling humiliated, Parker got on and persevered through the class. “I was shy as a young girl, so this was embarrassing for me,” says Parker. She continued riding hard and finished the class, workout and all. At the end, she was filled with joy when despite her struggles, she was called out the winner. “Horses definitely got me over a lot of my shyness,” she says.

Each horse that Parker has had the privilege of working with has taught her something valuable. Whooperman, the first horse that Parker purchased all on her own, was full of challenges. “I trained him myself,” comments Parker. “He was a tough guy and taught me a ton about working and getting along with a quirky horse.” Although, no two horses are alike. Parker also had the opportunity to ride some less difficult horses throughout her career, allowing her to experience a wide variety of personalities within the Saddlebred breed. “Dream High was a sweet horse that my dad and trainer bought for me,” recalls Parker. “That horse was by far the kindest and easiest horse they ever brought home for me.” With such a diverse background of horses in her life, it is no surprise that Parker has the ability to work with any horse that comes her way.

Growing up in a family who did not hand her a barn full of horses, Parker had to earn her success on her own. Although what may be a surprise to some, teaching horseback riding was not her first career choice. After attending high school at Glynn Academy, she furthered her education by attending Valdosta State University, attaining degrees in Adolescent Psychology and Middle Grades Education. It was from here that she went on to become a school teacher. After ten years of teaching middle school, Parker knew it was time for a change. “I never originally planned to have a barn, it





*Parker was a Kappa Alpha southern belle while attending college at Valdosta State University.*



*Before horses completely took over her interests, Parker played softball in elementary and middle school.*



*Parker tried her hand at ballet, tap and jazz when she was a young girl. It was only a matter of time before she realized she was better with animals than she was at dancing.*

just evolved into that," she said. "I was an amateur owner/trainer, when several parents approached me about taking on their horses and kids." From there, she knew that her calling included utilizing her teaching background in the form of riding lessons.

It was 1999 when Parker started to teach riding on a professional level. In 2005 her business was thriving. Parker knew it was time to purchase her own facility. Pine Haven Stables was born. "It was a terrifying jump," recalls Parker. "The initial investment plus the higher cost of hay and transportation were hurdles I had to overcome." And overcome she did. Today, Pine Haven stables sits on 11 acres, complete with a spring fed lake, riding trails and wood fenced pastures. The facility itself is a large L shaped barn with 14 stalls for training horses and a separate lesson barn that has 5 stalls. The indoor arena is an impressive 160x80 feet, and has a few stalls in the center. "I have come to realize how amazingly satisfying it is to know that I have built this farm myself," says Parker. "I survived divorce, the death of my best friend and my father's major illness. No one handed anything to me. It was just hard work, dedication and a heavy dose of stubbornness!"

Although she never worked for any other trainers in the industry, Parker cheerfully comments, "I am sure I have driven lots of people crazy visiting and learning from them!" Parker continues, "I'm an avid learner. I never feel I know enough or can't learn something from everyone. I sought advice and knowledge from many other trainers and have some incredible mentors." With the support of her peers and her love for teaching, Parker has brought Pine Haven Stables to the forefront of the Georgia equestrian community.

Turning out top riders at all levels of competition, she has a true appreciation and respect for any goal that a student wishes to attain, no matter the discipline. Parker has coached riders who excel in Saddle Seat, Western and everything in between. Seeing value in all styles of riding, Parker even brings dressage elements to her teaching. "I have an incredible dressage instructor from Florida that does clinics for my customers. She really has a great eye and the ability to take you back to the basics to get more balance and correctness out of your horse." A dedicated

instructor, Parker understands the importance of having a well-rounded facility, and feels "you should never stop learning." Parker prides herself on the family atmosphere she has created at her facility. Her horses come first in her life, with their health and happiness being the focus at her farm. Parker truly has created a heaven for horses and riders of all skill levels.

Parker also comments that her success has come not only from her talents, but from her smart decision making. "I never got in over my head," says Parker. "I have stayed small and selected horses for my clients that I could be successful with." A true professional, Parker knows what she wants to accomplish in her career, and if a customer has different needs, she does all she can to steer them in the right direction. "I'm not going to convince a customer to buy a high dollar two-year-old fine harness horse. If they want to go that route, I will help them by sending them to a good trainer who is proven in that area." Realizing where her expertise lies has truly allowed Parker to excel with her training operation.



*Parker and her first horse, Pinecrest's Treasure, showing in 13 and Under Equitation at the West Palm Beach Horse Show.*

Her passion for riding comes through loud and clear via her students. Pine Haven Stables welcomes all horses and riders, however Parker comments that her specialty lies within the equitation riders, as well as the juvenile and amateur teams she puts together. "I love pairing horses and riders together," says Parker, "helping riders reach their potential with a particular horse is something I truly enjoy." The list of champions that have emerged from Pine Haven Stables include riders who have won honors such as ASHA National Champion titles and People's Choice awards. She has also instructed riders who have been USEF World Cup team members, USEF Young Riders members, and World Cup Invitational team members. And it's not just the riders in the spotlight. The horses in her care also excel in the show horse community, garnering accolades such as ASHA State Champion honors in a variety of disciplines, breed ambassador awards, horse of the year awards, academy horse of the year awards, just to name a few. To top it all off, Parker also has found success with breeding. She orchestrated the breeding that produced the grand horse, Rich Kid, who previously won the Kentucky Futurity Reserve World Champion honors. As





*Parker all dressed for the Kappa Alpha Olde South Ball at Valdosta State University.*

well as I'm All That and Anna Cabana, both winners at one point in time of the Southeastern Futurity.

Parker is a very giving person of both her time and resources, both to her students and to the horse community in general. Many may not know that Parker was one of the original founders of one of the industry's most heartwarming and necessary projects, Saddlebred Rescue. "I started Saddlebred Rescue and secured the nonprofit status," says Parker. "After that, I found out that Nealia McCracken and Pat Johnson were also working on a similar type of rescue program." It made sense for the three Saddlebred lovers to combine their efforts. "Everything fell into place for us and Saddlebred Rescue took off, growing in contributions and rescues." Saddlebred Rescue may just be one of the most successful rescue agencies in the community today. Hundreds of horses have been saved from slaughter, with a good majority of them making a comeback as academy horses, or better yet, as competitive show horses.

The program continued to grow and thrive until it was of such grand scale, that Parker knew it was time to return her focus to her farm, full-time. "After 9/11 some happenstance events occurred that allowed Mark McCracken to come on board with Saddlebred Rescue, and he began handling the financial aspect of the Charity. Erin McCracken was also putting in many hours helping the program. I knew that Saddlebred Rescue had the key players it needed to continue on successfully." So, Parker decided to step back from the program. However, today she is still on the board. "It's a cause I strongly believe in. We give back to the horses

and they give back to us." Whether it be adopting a horse that is suitable for her needs, helping set up transportation for the horses that have been rescued to find their new homes, or just helping with fundraising and donations, she continually supports the program from behind the scenes.

It is evident that Parker is changing the game with her positive attitude towards all things horses and her proactive approach to changing the horse community for the better. She feels it is important for her to give back to the horses she loves so much. "I love the horses first and foremost, I greatly appreciate the life they have given me and always will make it a priority to give back to them and my industry." Saddlebred Rescue is just one example of how dedicated and generous Parker is to the industry. There are numerous horse shows and associations that benefit from the unwavering support and dedication that Parker gives. Aside from Saddlebred Rescue, Parker has been instrumental in the success of countless organizations. She is the Creator/Director of the UPHA Chapter 17 Horsemanship Challenge, the UPHA Chapter 17 Chairperson (2016 and 2017), as well as a member of the ASHA Marketing Committee (2015-2017), ASHA Riding Program Council (2014-2017), and ASHA Charter Club Council (2015-2017). Her service to the American Saddlebred and the show horse industry is one to be admired.

Even with all the time she donates to programs within our community, she still finds the time to perfect her riders' skills, to keep her horses in tip-top shape, and to work day in and day out to provide a barn atmosphere where everyone is welcome. All you

*Parker and Whooperman, the first horse she bought with her own hard earned money as well as one of the first horses that Parker trained all on her own.*



*Parker and her horse Dream High winning at the ASAC horse show. Dream High was purchased by her father and trainer at the Tattersalls Sale.*



*Parker and Pinecrest's Treasure winning the 13 and Under Equitation class at the Tampa Charity Horse Show.*





*Ch My Special Sultan and Rachel Rafolski winning the Junior Exhibitor Show Pleasure class at Southeastern Charity. Parker has instructed many top riders over the years, and Rafolski is just one example. Rafolski was Parker's very first student. She was also Parker's first Lexington Junior League blue ribbon winner, and first Saddle Seat World Cup team member.*

## AWARDS

2016 Saddlebred Rescue Founders Award  
2015 ASHA Reserve World Champion Barn Ambassador  
2014 & 2009 UPHA Chapter 17 National Horse Person of the Year  
6 time ASHA of Georgia High Point Trainer  
2008 Olde Milton Hall of Fame Inductee  
2007 USEF Hero's for Horses National Award Winner  
2005 UPHA Chapter 17 Trainer Achievement Winner

## SERVICE

2017 USEF Young Riders Coach-Team USA  
2016-17 UPHA Chapter 17 Chairperson  
2015-17 ASHA Marketing Committee  
2015-17 ASHA Charter Club Council  
2014-2015 President South East Show Horse Association  
2012 & 2013 ASHA Youth Committee  
2014-2017 ASHA Riding Program Council  
2012-2015 Co Chair United Professional Horseman's Association Chapter 17  
2012 American Saddle Horse Association of GA - Vice President  
Founder & Board member of Saddlebred Rescue, Inc a 501c3  
Pro-Am Benefit Horse Show-Board Member  
2010-2011 Show Chairman for American Saddle Horse Association of Georgia  
Creator/Director of UPHA CH 17 Horsemanship Challenge

*Parker and the fancy pony Twin Willows Storm Warning. This duo is seen here winning a class in the open road pony division, proving that not only is Parker good with horses and riders, but she can handle ponies as well.*



need to do is speak with some of her students, and it will become obvious that the impact Parker has on the lives of those she works with, is seen in and out of the show ring.

Diane Plamp Keen Dorsey, a customer of Parker, speaks highly of her trainer, "Five years ago, at 56 years young and 20 years away from the show ring, I decided I wanted back in." And Parker was there to step up to the task. "She took on the challenge and delivered in spades," comments Dorsey. "She has an uncanny gift and works tirelessly to match her riders with the perfect mount to meet their expectations, abilities and personalities. And the best part is, she can do it to fit most any budget." Dorsey also comments on how Parker has helped to grow the local show scene in southern Georgia. "We all read so much on social media about smaller horse shows dying on the vine because trainers won't support them, that there is no room for entry level or mid-level horses and riders anymore, horse shows are

no fun anymore and a myriad of other complaints. None of that is true in southern Georgia and the trend has caught on throughout the southeast, due largely to the efforts and forward thinking of Christy Parker. I'm proud to call her a friend and blessed to be a part of the Pine Haven family."

Ashley Brandies, another rider who has experienced a high level of success under the direction of Parker, comments, "Christy is so good at pushing and challenging you. She makes riding fun and new every time you take a lesson."

In the coming years, the horse community is sure to continue to benefit from the contributions that Parker is making. Her behind the scenes efforts supporting so many programs within the industry are needed, and Parker has no plans of backing off from giving her all. Christy Parker has been an asset to the industry she loves so much, and in the coming years will continue to leave a lasting impression on all those whose lives she touches.

*Parker meets her student's CH Reggie's Indigo Jim and Diane Dorsey at the out gate at the Dixie Cup Classic Horse Show.*



*Parker and her best friend Ellie. Ellie is an important member of Pine Haven Stables, and is in her second year of remission from lymphoma. Ellie was diagnosed the same week that Parker lost her friend, Nancy Forter.  
photo by Casey McBride*

